



U.S. Immigration
and Customs
Enforcement

January 26, 2005

News Release

2 SENTENCED FOR PASSPORT FRAUD, ALIEN SMUGGLING

CHICAGO— A member of an international alien smuggling organization that recruited U.S. citizens to apply for U.S. passports using photographs of illegal aliens from South America – mostly children from Ecuador - was sentenced to two years in prison for his role in smuggling hundreds of illegal aliens into the United States for fees of \$12,000 to \$14,000 each.

Efrain Rendon, a 49-year-old illegal alien from Ecuador, was sentenced before the U.S. District Court of the Northern District of Illinois Jan. 14 to two years prison, three years supervised release and fined \$100 for conspiracy to fraudulently obtain United States passports for the purpose of smuggling South Americans into the United States for financial gain.

The same court also sentenced Joanne E. Rendon, Efrain Rendon's wife, for her participation in the smuggling enterprise. Joanne Rendon, a 38-year-old U.S. citizen, was sentenced Jan. 13 to two years probation and fined \$100.

"Human smuggling is a dangerous and profitable criminal enterprise that can pose a threat to our national security," said ICE Special Agent-in-Charge Elissa Brown, who leads investigations in Chicago. "ICE has zero tolerance for anyone making, selling, providing, or using fraudulent documents. As the 9/11 Commission pointed out, fraudulent documents are primary tools of terrorists and criminals that enable them to cover their tracks and move freely from place to place."

The Rendons and their co-conspirators were the targets of a two-year joint investigation conducted by U.S. Immigration and Customs Enforcement, the United States Attorneys Office, the State Department's Bureau of Diplomatic Security, and the United States Postal Inspection Service.

The investigation began Jan. 7, 2003 into an alien smuggling organization that was dedicated to the illegal recruitment, transportation, harboring, and smuggling of hundreds of illegal aliens from Ecuador and South America into the United States for fees of \$12,000 to \$14,000 each.

The organization recruited U.S. citizens who were willing to obtain U.S. passports fraudulently for a fee. Once the U.S. citizen agreed to assist in fraudulently obtaining the U.S. passport, they would be provided with a photo of an undocumented alien to submit with the passport application. The U.S. citizen would be paid \$300 to \$500 to turn the passport over to the alien smuggling organization.

Smuggling organizers in New York collected payment from the family members of the alien. Payment of smuggling fees and distribution of illicit proceeds were distributed between the conspirators via wire transfers and cash transactions. Seven individuals have been arrested and presented for prosecution as a result of this joint investigation.

Upon completion of his sentence, Efrain Rendon will be eligible for immediate deportation from the United States as a criminal alien. ICE will place a detainer on him to notify the Bureau of Prisons that he is to be released to the custody of ICE when his sentence is complete.

ICE

U.S. Immigration and Customs Enforcement was established in March 2003 as the largest investigative arm of the Department of Homeland Security. ICE is comprised of five integrated divisions that form a 21st century law enforcement agency with broad responsibilities for a number of key homeland security priorities.